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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the need for a quality written constitution for student government. The thought process involved in implementing democracy in the university setting is outlined in 10 steps. Members of the student government need to realize the tremendous potential of using the democratic process to resolve disagreements. Each of the 10 process steps is discussed in detail and what is involved in student government and the role or roles each member has is clarified. Decision making by students needs to be stressed throughout their formal school years. Members in student government should then improve in the quality of decisions made. (AVC)

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STUDENT GOVERNMENT IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

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STUDENT GOVERNMENT IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

Too frequently, there are complaints by students that school governance is ineffective and does not function. Thus, what is decided upon in student government may be overruled by university administrators. Sometimes, members of a student government council do not attend the meetings in a faithful manner. Perhaps, the goals of these members is to have the position title on their vitae alone. What and how much is accomplished in student government does not matter to these members.

There needs to be a quality written constitution for student government. The constitution has a code of ethics in which disagreements can be resolved among competing groups and individuals. An orderly process needs to be evidence so that students may feel that conflicts can be worked out between and among students, as well as with administrators, staff, or faculty. Students should not feel helpless but realize that they can receive a fair shake when disagreements are in the offing.

Democracy in student government is salient as a way of operating and governing. There are definite strands of thought involved in implementing democracy in the university setting:

1. Students must develop attitudes of respect toward other human beings.

2. Each person is to be valued for his/her uniqueness as well as similarity of traits inherent between and among individuals.

3. Each individual regardless of race, creed, or religion should have ample opportunities to develop to his/her optimum.

4. Ample opportunities in learning must be provided whereby individuals are able to relate to each other in a positive way.

5. Democratic living is an ideal and each individual may continually move in the direction of realizing these and related objectives more fully.

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6. Individual differ from each other in degrees in terms of exhibiting democratic behavior.

7. Students individually and in groups must have ample opportunities to engage in identifying and attempt to solve realistic lifelike problems.

8. Students personally and in committees must develop a set of values which give direction and meaning to life.

9. Students need to be given opportunities to develop an adequate self concept. This is necessary so that each person may exhibit responsible behavior in society.

10. students individually and in groups must develop criteria whereby problems and weaknesses in society are identified and attempts made at remedying these deficiencies (Ediger, 1996).

I will present guidelines here to clarify what is involved in student government and the role(s) that each member has.

Principles and Guidelines of Student Government

Too often, individuals feel they are not members of the university community. These individuals stress that student government does not deal with relevant problems nor are they interested in doing so. All students need to realize they are members of the educational community and therefore must be actively involved in moving from where the institution is to where it should be in terms of ideals. Rules and regulations do affect all of us when our interests and needs are involved. There are things that can be done to make for change in a positive manner. It appears that society continually changes much and this indicates that student government also needs to change to incorporate student needs and interests. Students must to be active participants, not passive recipients in the formation of rules and regulations. They need to believe that the student government has their interests and needs at heart.

Democracy as a way of life needs to be practiced. Participants in

student government then must respect each other and the ideas presented. Ideas in a meeting follow an agenda that was prepared two days before the meeting. Upon agreement by student government members, agenda items may be changed and modified. Items for the agenda should also come from the community of student learners on the university campus. Quality leadership is important for a student government meeting. Adequate deliberation for each item on the agenda is a must. Each member should participate adequately. Ideas presented are evaluated in terms of their worth, not by who presented them. Items on the agenda are considered seriously,

Second, those students who are on the student government council need to realize they represent the interests and needs of students at large. Student government positions are not selfish in nature, but rather represent opportunities for service and leadership. Members of the student government then represent others and this function needs to be taken seriously. Student at large should have ample opportunities to present their ideas to the student government council. Council members should take others seriously who make recommendations for improving life on a school campus.

Participants in student government need to communicate clearly, with the clientele, the objectives and concerns of the governing organization. Problems in student government should be discussed freely with others so that input is forth coming. Certainly, the learning community should be aware of the successes of the student government.

Problem solving is important in student government. Problems need to be identified in a precise manner. diverse solutions should be offered in answer to each problem area. Each tentative solution needs to be tested in a lifelike situation, if possible. Those tentative solutions that withstand the tests may be kept as solutions until new problems arise.

Decision-making skills should be practiced by participants in student government. Organizational skills need to be practiced also. The constituency needs to be organized so that there are more agreements as to which problem areas to identify and solve.

Third, members of student government councils should emphasize the ideals of students first. They are in a group whereby service is emphasized to others, not to themselves. To improve the quality of living on a campus should be the ultimate goal. These goals then incorporate a fair and just community. Disputes that arise can be resolved in an orderly way, not through gossip, pressure, violence nor through innuendoes. When letters are written to the editor of the campus newspaper, they need to reflect the views of what is good for all, not for the few who attempt to secure the good things only for themselves. The good of the campus community as a whole needs to be in the offing as a major objective of student government.

Fourth, student interests and needs extend beyond the campus and into the larger community. Student interests and needs are involved in such items as inadequate off campus housing and a lack of safety in those areas. Students living in these negative situations should know where to go to voice their concerns and what the student government can do to improve the quality of off campus housing. An orderly process of appeal and concern in these situations should be of concern for student government action. Decision-making by students and the student government need to stress engagement, deliberation, and concern for improving the current situation. Student government should become aware of channels of power that are available to rectify negative situations.

Fifth, student government members need to be aware of information that would assist their becoming more proficient in their roles. I believe that student council members too frequently do not attempt to listen to students at large nor do they wish to give the time for these encounters. There needs to be dedication among student government members who truly do wish to be of service and are knowledgeable about violations of student rights. Student government members should make it known to others that they do wish to serve the interests and needs of the campus community. They need to act upon statements from students or credibility will be lost in the student government arena. Rational thinking, critical and creative thinking, as

well as problem solving are four skills that all student government members need.

Sixth, members of student governments need to attach meaning to and attempt to implement what are legal duties and responsibilities of the university community and of individual students. There should be times scheduled for meeting with students to hear their concerns for a better university community of learners. Input form these students is indeed valuable in a democratic setting.

Seventh, student government members need to attend meetings and workshops to improve personal knowledge, skills, and attitudes involving democratic procedures in ongoing sessions. These opportunities of inservice education should stress quality objectives, learning opportunities to achieve the stated objectives, and evaluation procedures to notice the effectiveness of meetings and workshops on improving student government. Student government members are leaders of the peer university community and yet they also serve others. Leadership and service are two objectives for student government members to fulfill.

Student government meetings and workshops should stress

1. meaning, understanding and acceptance of others.
2. purpose and reasons for the undertaking to improve service as student government members.
3. morale building and the release of energy levels in guiding for an improved university community.
4. provision for individual talents and strengths.
5. secure student interest and attention.
6. development of quality attitudes by participants.
7. definite goal attainment by participants.
8. follow guidelines for acceptance and respect for others and their contributions.
9. develop problems solving skills within participants.
10. enhance the self concept of individuals (Ediger, 1995).

There is a dual role here in student government members being

leaders as well as responsible servants.

Eighth, university administrators need to back the work of student governments but not serve in the capacity as advisors. Participants in student government should operate in a democratic manner in conducting business for the good of students in the university community. Faculty advisors should assist students to become increasingly efficient in securing the thinking of students in the university community and involve these individuals in providing needed ideas to strengthen the positive side of university life and living.

Ninth, participants in student government should have a thorough understanding of changing constitutional principles which are applicable to university students and the related communities.

The environment we learn in must be a community. We all share common interests of learning, wanting what is best for all, and needing to belong. This community of learners, including teachers, has basic rights. With these rights come responsibilities for ourselves and others. Our shared learning experiences, community service, and involvement are all examples of responsibilities. We have responsibilities for our own actions based on decisions we make.

Our community of learners should reflect that of our larger community, with its diversity, culture, abilities, ethnicity, and religions. When we focus upon what we share with others, it establishes bonds that bind our communities in a variety of ways. When we were young children, we looked for this commonality as we accepted others. This trait needs to be nurtured throughout our schooling. The diversity that exists among us needs to be seen as an opportunity for learning. Each person comes with unique life experiences and influences that have helped structure and shape who he or she is. By working and learning with others, we are privy to those unique experiences (Rowley and Willems, 1995).

Tenth, a code of ethics needs to guide student government behavior and the larger constituency. Students are citizens presently and are members of the larger community. Students should take on the responsibilities of citizenship with its attendant behaviors and duties.

Accountability for participants in student government is a must. Thus, there needs to be an opportunity for students to appraise the quality of work performed by members of student government. Criteria used to evaluate should be clear and specific. All students should be involved in the evaluation process. Results from the evaluation should be shared with student government members. With the feedback, there is a better chance for student government members to think about ways of improving their performance. The role of each student government member needs to be clarified and modified to meet the needs and interests of students at large.

Conclusion

Student government tenets need to rest upon the tenets of democracy. Democracy is a way of life and also a form of government. Members in student government need to realize the tremendous potential in using the democratic processes in resolving disagreements. the democratic process provides for a broader base of individuals when policies are made. Judgments are made from the combined judgments of individuals rather than one person alone. Individuals then need to share in decision-making, but also take responsibility for these implemented decisions. Self directing individuals is an ultimate goal of a democracy, be it on the university level or in society.There needs to be an appreciation for democracy as a tenet to work effectively on a university campus. Individuals then need to understand meanings pertaining to the concept of "Democracy," and accept approaches of implementation of this concept.

In a democracy, there needs to be cooperative endeavors for the good of all, not a select few. Leaders in student government then need to encourage student participation on the university campus in making decisions for the common good. Democracy cannot do well when a few selfish individuals make choices in student government. There is much room for healthy competition in a democracy. The best within each individual needs to be brought forth. There is much room for experimentation in a democracy. The best ways or approaches need to

be sought to improve student government and campus life for all individuals. Equality of opportunity needs to abound so that each person has opportunities to work harmoniously with others in reaching toward the highest and best goals for all. Democracy is the highest social goals for participants in a democracy. Respect for the individual as well as the group are musts in a democracy.

Decision-making by students needs to be stressed throughout their formal school years. Members in student government should then improve in the quality of decisions made.

Without question, the future promises to be increasingly complex in regard to ethical questions in medicine, the environment and society. Students of all grades, ages, and abilities need assistance in developing decision-making processes about issues presently affecting their lives and for future issues that we cannot even anticipate...(Campoy, 1997).

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